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AUTHOR Garber, Malcolm
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Florida Parent Educator Program as a component of Planned Variation Head Start. The program is currently being implemented in four communities embraces a philosophy of cognitive transactionalism, a philosophy molded by the work of Jean Piaget and others. This philosophy states that "the child is born with a set of sensory motor operations (or responses) to perform on his environment in order to know it himself." The major foundation upon which the program rests is the parent's presentation of materials which engage the child in learning activity. Tasks should have the following qualities: (1) The learner does a lot of talking; (2) The learner has fun doing the task; (3) The directions are clear enough that it can be taught by the mothering one; (4) Teacher and learner understand why they are performing the task; (5) The task encourages the teacher to use a lot of ways to teach; (6) Home materials are used; (7) The learner knows he has learned something; and (8) The learner is encouraged to think up new activities or things to do which grow out of the task. The broad objectives of the Parent Educator program are to develop educational competence in the child, enhance the cognitive development of the child, and help to generate a home atmosphere which will allow the child to be resilient to the demands which schools make on him. The program is more focused on the process employed by mothering ones when teaching their children than on the specific product outcome associated with any given task. (CK)

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# The Florida Parent Educator Program

By

Malcolm Garber[1]

In the May, 1971 issue of Educational Leadership Guidelines for the Analyses and Description of Early Childhood Education Programs were outlined by the Early Childhood Education Council of ASCD. This paper describes the Florida Parent Educator Program as a component of Planned Variation Head Start according to those Guidelines.

## I. Assumptions Regarding Human Development and Learning

The Florida Parent Educator Program as it is currently being implemented in four Planned Variation Head Start communities embraces a philosophy of cognitive transactionalism. This philosophy was molded by the work of Jean Piaget and Ira Gordon among others. The philosophy is well stated by Cowles[2] "the child is born with a set of sensory motor operations (or responses) to perform on his environment in order to know it himself. As a result of these transactions, and physiological maturation, the original sensory motor operations are: (a) built into increasingly more complex patterns; (b) internalized so they can be carried on mentally; and (c) tied to language symbols and language system." (p. 795) In other words, the child's ability to understand the world around him grows with experience. This concept also presupposes an inherited endowment which emerges as the individual interacts with his environment. The position of cognitive

PS 005566

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[1]Assistant Professor of Education and Director of the Head Start Planned Variation - Florida Model Program, Institute for Development of Human Resources, College of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

[2]Cowles, Milly. Four Views of Learning and Development, Educational Leadership. May 1971, pp. 790-795.

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transactionalism holds that with proper environmental stimulation, the child will develop his ability to think and to use language to reason.

## II. Under What Conditions Can Development be (best) Fostered or Facilitated

The key agent in the child's development is the parent. The parent's presentation of materials which engage the child in learning activity is the major foundation upon which the program rests. Learning materials from the home are often utilized to teach the child. Teaching ideas developed by the Head Start teaching team are also brought into the home. These ideas may be developed by the Policy Council, the parent, the University of Florida, or a specialist. The ideas for teaching are called tasks. Tasks should have the following qualities:

1. The learner does a lot of talking. He tells about things, gives reasons, asks questions, tells you why, where, what, how.
2. The learner has fun doing the task and there is a lot of interest and action.
3. The directions are clear enough that it can be taught by the mothering one.
4. You and the learner understand why you are doing it and what it is for.
5. It encourages the teacher to use a lot of ways to teach, and the learner to try different ways to do it. That is, it is not cut and dried, but takes thinking and swinging with what happens.
6. If possible, home materials are used.
7. The learner knows he has learned something, he can see it right away and feel good about it.
8. The learner is encouraged to think up new activities or things to do which grow out of the task.

As the mothering one or parent experiences the success of teaching the child and seeing this child grow, the mothering one's self concept

feelings of mastery, and teaching style will change. With this change the home environment will become more supportive of the child. With additional home support, resistance to the child's possible psychological emasculation in the schools will be fostered. Open communication lines between the home and school can produce healthy atmosphere for learning in the classroom.

III. Aims and Objectives

1. The broad objectives of the Parent Educator program are to develop educational competence in the child, enhance the cognitive development of the child, and help to generate a home atmosphere which will allow the child to be resiliant to the demands which schools make on him.

2. Intermediate objectives include the following:

   A. Cognitive - the development of the child's ability to reason and solve problems.

   B. Language - the development of speaking and listening skills.

   C. Affective - positive self concept, proper motivation, curiosity, interest.

   D. Home Environment and Teaching Style - changes in the way parents use reward systems, availability of materials for learning in the home, opportunities provided for learning outside the home, press for language development, reading press, expectations for school and awareness of intellectual development are hoped for. Also changes in the teaching style of parents are sought and evaluated.

IV. Process vs Product Outcomes

The Parent Educator model is more focused on the process employed by mothering ones when teaching their children than on the specific product outcome associated with any given task. Seven desirable teaching behaviors are viewed as process goals.

Desirable Teaching Behaviors

1. Elicit questions from the learner.
2. Ask questions that have more than one correct answer.
3. Elicit more than one-word answers from the learner; encourage the learner to enlarge upon response and use complete sentences.
4. Praise the learner when he does well or even takes small steps in the right direction. Let the learner know when he is wrong, but do so in a positive or neutral manner.
5. Get the learner to evaluate or make judgments or choices on the basis of evidence and/or criteria, rather than by random guessing, chance, luck, authority, etc.
6. Give the learner time to think about the problem; don't be too quick to help.
7. Give the child some time to familiarize himself with the task materials. Before proceeding into a structured learning situation, give the learner an introduction or overview.

V. Changes in Adult Roles

Three adult roles are examined:

1. the teachers
2. the parent educators
3. the parents

Specific measures of morale are employed to examine change in teacher roles. Changes in self concept and locus of control are also examined among parents and parent educators. The role of the parent

educator and teacher in the classroom is also examined with the taxonomy of classroom behaviors.

VI. Time Frame

It is expected that by the time the child has completed the third grade in school the impact of the program should be felt. Not only should the child be more able to handle materials and subject matters of the schools but both parents and children should be working more closely together to negotiate the school system. Parents should be actively engaged in teaching their children. They should also be involved in classroom activities. The educational institution itself should begin to change in a way which makes it more responsive to the needs of the children and the wishes of the parents. Administrative leaders in the schools and teachers in the classrooms should provide opportunities for parents to participate in the school's program.

VII. Principal Programs and Procedures

A. Initial Assessments

There is an initial review of the environmental process aspects of the home. Each week a Parent Educator Weekly Report is made on each home visit by the parent educator so that progress in home interview technique and adequacy of tasks can be checked. Measures of the child's self concept and his beginning school achievement are also examined initially.

The morale of teachers is also examined. Paraprofessional views of themselves and their locus of control are also measured initially.

A task library which is now being developed will be tried out and refined in the communities through the joint cooperation of teachers

PS005366

parent educators, and parents. Evaluation of the tasks will be undertaken through our task monitoring system at the University of Florida. This does not mean that the Florida people will provide the curriculum for the communities. Parents and Head Start staff will continue to independently develop new teaching ideas for their own communities. However, the University of Florida will help refine and send out new tasks too.

One task can be used either for an individual child or for a large group of children. If it is the decision of the teaching team that the whole group could benefit from one task, then by all means, the one task should be employed by the whole group of parents. If, on the other hand, one task is considered favorable for one home but not for any other then it may be sent to one home only.

VIII. Administrative Organizational Requirements

Members of the local community are very much encouraged to make decisions about the program. Direct involvement is concerned with:

1. Setting up the curriculum and deciding on objectives
2. Policy making
3. Selecting staff
4. Selecting children
5. Deciding on budgets

Academic requirements of personnel are set by the individual communities. Staff is selected locally.

IX. Staff Development

Three summer workshops are held for staff training. The first is a one-week workshop for Policy Council chairmen and Head Start

directors. It is aimed at helping Head Start directors and parents work out important policy aims regarding the program. Feedback about program progress is also given. Changes in program tactics are considered. The second summer workshop is designed to teach a nucleus of staff the essential methods employed by the model. The third summer workshop is also held on-site in communities for those unable to attend the two-week workshop in Gainesville.

Periodic consultant visits continue the training initiated in the summer workshops.

The Parent Educator Program is one of many operated through the Institute for Development of Human Resources. This Institute, founded by Ira J. Gordon, is primarily staffed with full-time faculty of the University of Florida. Each of the professors have their own ideas and views about what new directions our program should take. There is considerable give and take about where we should be going. However, once decisions are made they become policy, and like all policy decisions made by our group are implemented by the group - like them or not. If they are not liked, we have the option of convincing our colleagues to change these decisions. Believe it or not, policy does get changed. More than changing policy, the Institute staff grows as well. Membership in our group is often considered an investment in personal development. Not only do children, parents, and teachers grow, but our University staff also grows and develops.